

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR

*FROM CHRISTENDOM TO APOSTOLIC MISSION:
PASTORAL STRATEGIES FOR AN APOSTOLIC AGE*

USING THE STUDY SERIES BY
THE DIOCESE OF SIOUX FALLS

sfcatholic.org/discipleship/apostolic-mission



INTRODUCTION

Archbishop Pérez has asked everyone in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to read the book, *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission: Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age*. He cites it as a foundational source for understanding his vision for reform and renewal in the Church of Philadelphia.

This study guide is intended to help pastors and parish leaders engage the content of the book using the seven summary videos hosted by Fr. Scott Traynor and Dr. Chris Burgwald of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, SD

- o The video series can be found at: sfcatholic.org/discipleship/apostolic-mission

The discussion questions that follow are intended to help parish leaders apply the principles of the book and videos to practical, everyday life in the parish.

Depending on the length of your meetings, it is likely that your group will not be able to discuss all of the questions included. The facilitator should prayerfully read the questions in advance of the meeting and discern which questions to focus on during each meeting.

It is recommended that you begin each meeting with a short period of Lectio Divina. Suggested Scripture passages have been noted with each meeting. The Appendix contains scripts for leading your group in Lectio Divina.

Suggested meeting format:

5 minutes	Lectio Divina
10-15 minutes	Watch Sioux Falls video
Remaining time	Discuss questions

May the Holy Spirit illumine your conversations and bring to light practical, fruitful paths forward for your parish!

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MEETING 1

Book: Introduction and Chapter 1, pages 1-17

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 1 (12 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFCwmXiYwL8&t=700s>

Scripture passage: Revelation 21:3-5 - "I make all things new" or 2 Cor 5:14-17 "in Christ you are a new creation"

Discussion Questions

Introduction (Minutes 0:00-6:23)

Point 1: "We are living in an era in which we are experiencing a massive culture shift. We are moving from Christendom into an apostolic age."

- a) *Give some examples from your own life of how you have seen this culture shift playing out. In other words, how have you seen our society lose its Christian worldview?*

Point 2: "We need to shift our approach to correspond to the new cultural situation that we are living in. We can't keep doing the same things the same way expecting a different outcome."

- a) *Give some examples of ways that our parish may still be operating with a Christendom mindset. In other words, in what ways is our parish doing the same things in the same way even though they aren't working?*

Point 3: "We are dealing with a post-Christian culture, people who think they have tried Christianity already, found it wanting and are no longer interested."

- a) *Why does the post-Christian, "been there, done that" mentality make it harder for the parish to reach people who are disconnected from the Church?*

Chapter 1: The Place of a Ruling Imaginative Vision in Human Cultures (Minutes 6:34-11:46)

Point 4: Every culture and every person is governed by a “ruling imaginative vision,” a set of beliefs about God, the world and the person that determine how they live their lives.

- a) *What are the main tenets of our society’s “ruling imaginative vision?” For example:*
 - *What does our culture believe about God?*
 - *What does our culture think is the purpose of human existence?*
 - *What does our culture say will make you happy?*
 - *What behavior do we praise?*
 - *What behavior do we condemn?*

- b) *What aspects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ does our culture particularly reject?*
- c) *What aspects of the Gospel does our culture accept and value?*
- d) *How can we leverage the points of agreement between the culture and the Gospel to build “on ramps” for people connect with the parish?*

MEETING 2

Book: Chapter 2: Christendom and Apostolic Modes: Advantages and Challenges, pages 19-28

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 2 (12 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReA2SFEPRG8>

Scripture passage: Luke 12:49-50 - "I have come to set the earth on fire"

Discussion Questions

Point 1: In a **Christendom** culture, there is a tendency among Catholics to "lukewarmness, going through the motions, drifting along with their Catholic Faith rather than living it as the fruit of deep, personal commitment"

- a) *Would you say that the majority of our parishioners are "drifting along" in their faith or are the majority "on fire" with deep personal commitment to Christ? What makes you think so?*
- b) *What are the things that shake people out of lukewarmness? In other words, what sources does the parish have at her disposal to set people's hearts on fire for Jesus?*
- c) *How can we as a parish bring our parishioners into contact with these sources?*

Point 2: In a **Christendom** culture, there is a tendency to "maintenance, keeping the machine well-oiled." We tend to think that the pastor's job is to "keep up the things that already exist."

- a) *How have you seen this mindset about the pastor's role express itself among parishioners?*
- b) *How can you as a parish awaken in parishioners a sense of "we need to try something new and we need our pastor to show us how"?*

Point 3: In an **Apostolic** age, creating new institutions and structures will be like “building a house in a gale force wind.”

- a) *What kind of resistance (within the parish and from the wider culture) should you expect to meet when attempting to build new structures and ways of doing things at the parish?*
- b) *What are the practices and habits that we as parish leaders need to have in order to persevere in the midst of resistance and challenge?*
- c) *How can you implement these practices and habits now in order to lay a solid foundation for persevering over the long haul in the process of transforming your parish?*

MEETING 3

Book: Pages 29-34, Chapter 3: The Current Climate

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 3 (10 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEX8pl6KpGE>

Scripture passage: Ezekiel 47:12 - "Along the river, fruit trees will grow"

Discussion Questions

Point 1: "The Gospel retains an ability to fascinate and attract in every age because it corresponds to how God made us."

- a) What is the current level of your conviction that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has its own power to transform hearts and transform your parish? What is one thing you can do to deepen that conviction?
- b) How can we cultivate an expectant hope for God's transforming action in our parish? Among parish leaders? Among parishioners?

Point 2: Here is what apostolic mission looks like: all members of the parish are "going out intentionally to form relationships...to engage people...to invite them, in the context of friendship, to encounter the person of Jesus Christ."

- a) How do you think parishioners will respond to the idea that they have a mission to conduct this kind of person-to-person evangelization with the people around them?
- b) How can we as a parish begin to build a comfort level with this among parishioners?

Point 3: "Our strategies need to flow from the deep, profound spiritual wells and sources in the Church. These are the true sources of power in the Church and they are still at our disposal."

- a) Name some of the Church's strongest sources of power and grace.
- b) What is one thing we can do as a parish to tap one of these wellsprings and allow it to gush forth in our parish community?
- c) How can we ensure that our strategies are flowing from these wellsprings and are not initiatives of our own invention?

MEETING 4

Book: Pages 35-51, Chapter 4: Devising a Pastoral Strategy for this Transitional Time

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 4 (14 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8L7eVfGXbQ>

Scripture passage: Psalm 127:1-2 - "If the Lord does not build the house..." or Exodus 14:10-14 - "The Lord will fight for you, you need only keep still..."

Discussion Questions

Point 1: (1) Gaining an apostolic attitude

The first Christians had no resources to work with. Despite this, they went forward with confidence that "Jesus is going to do the heavy lifting."

- a) Why is it helpful and important to remember the situation of the early Church in terms of their lack of material resources and social acceptance?
- b) In what ways have you seen in yourself or in the way parish ministry is conducted an unhealthy self-reliance or reliance on material resources for success?
- c) How can we as individuals and as a parish shift from dependence on our own efforts and resources to dependence on the power of God? Give an example of what this could look like.

Point 2: (2) Refusing to be trapped by social analysis

"It's surprising what God can do in challenging circumstances." "No one in a sociological study would have seen that coming." "The Church has great powers of regeneration." We need to "be alert to the graces God is giving" for this new time.

- a) What does the sociological data predict about the future of our parish?
- b) What is the problem with listening only to sociological data when thinking about the future of our parish?

- c) Give an example of a time that you have seen God work in unexpected ways either in your own life, in the parish or in history?
- d) Why is it important for us to remember the stories of God's surprising interventions in our lives and in Church history?
- e) What are some things we can do to bring these stories to our parishioners? What purpose would that serve?

Point 3: (3) Maintaining and Using Institutions Differently

"A fish that is floating downstream is a dead fish."

- a) What is some evidence that you have seen that our parish ministries are "drifting downstream," i.e. floating along without any serious evaluation of their fruitfulness or their alignment with the Church's evangelizing mission?
- b) Name some groups, ministries or events in the parish that have been around a long time but are still doing the same thing they have been doing since they began?
- c) What do you think will be the response of the leaders of these ministries to this call to re-envision, prune and reform?
- d) What might parish leadership do to win these leaders over to the goodness of this effort?
- e) Practically speaking, what will ministry leaders need in order to undertake a serious reform of their ministry?

MEETING 5

Book: Pages 51-64, Chapter 4: Devising a Pastoral Strategy for this Transitional Time

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 5 (12 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-zLi-auFMc&t=719s>

Scripture passage: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - "I handed on to you as of first importance..."

Discussion Questions

Point 1: (5) Rethinking priestly life and education in light of the current cultural context

Priests need to be formed to be "evangelical entrepreneurs" rather than managers who focus on "how to keep the plates spinning."

- a) In what way is this vision of priesthood different from what you have thought in the past?
- b) Does your parish tend to think that the priest alone is responsible for mission?
- c) What are some practical things you can do as a parish to instill in people's minds the missionary obligation of the laity and their call to support their priests in these efforts?

Point 2: (6) Allocating resources with apostolicity in mind

"Wherever the fire is burning, we want to fan that flame and make it burn more."

- a) Where in the parish is a living fire for Christ already burning? Which people? Which ministries/events?
- b) How can we "fan the flame" for this person or ministry? What could this look like?

Getting practical about parish allocation of resources

- c) Looking at our current budget, what does our parish spend most of its money on?
- d) Currently, which groups and events use the parish's meeting spaces the most?
- e) What events or groups take up the most space on the parish calendar?
- f) Does this current allocation of resources reflect the primacy of apostolic mission? If not, what are some changes that could reasonably be made so that the budget, calendar and meeting space are better aligned with the parish's apostolic mission?

Specifically for parish staff

- g) Thinking about your work week, what do you spend the most time working on?
- h) How much time do you spend on person-to-person relationship-building, leading people in prayer, talking to people about Jesus or teaching people the truths of the faith?
- i) Given a suggested benchmark of a 50-50 balance of time spent between administrative duties and pastoral ministry, what is one thing you can do to better allocate your work hours to reach this goal?

Point 3: (7) Being ready to put up with a certain apostolic "messiness"

Whenever we are acting with a spirit of "entrepreneurialism, innovation and creativity" we have to be okay with things not being neat and tidy, according to schedule. "Conversion to Christ is not on a schedule."

- a) What is meant by "apostolic messiness?" Give an example.
- b) What is the difference between messiness that results from the prioritization of mission versus messes that are the result of imprudence or lukewarmness?
- c) Apostolic messiness results when we prioritize personal encounter and the proclamation of the Gospel over paperwork, policies and schedules. Describe your comfort level with this kind of messiness. What virtues can you ask God to give you to help?

Point 4: (8) Expecting cultural influence to be exercised primarily by impressive witness

"Influence in an apostolic age comes from a captivating witness to the Gospel."

- a) Think of a time in your life when you were captivated by something or someone. What was the experience like? What did you feel? What happened interiorly?
- b) What is the difference between being a "captivating witness" vs. being "a good person?"
- c) How can we help more of our parishioners become captivating witnesses to the Gospel? What do they need for this to happen?

We need to be ready to share with people "how Jesus has made all the difference in my life."

- a) What portion of the parish is currently ready to answer the question, "How has Jesus made all the difference in your life?"
- b) What needs to happen so that more parishioners can answer this question fluidly and without hesitation?

MEETING 6

Book: Pages 65-75, Chapter 5: The Key Task: Conversion of Mind to a New Way of Seeing

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 6 (10 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHhbRtduyUo>

Scripture passage: Ephesians 6:10-12 - "for our battle is not with flesh and blood but with the powers and principalities..."

Discussion Questions

Point 1: Our task is "to propose this grand adventure and narrative, God's story about our life, the story of God's love for us:

- I. God created man for friendship with Him.
- II. I've squandered that friendship through sin.
- III. God so loved me that He gave Jesus that I might not die but have everlasting life.
- IV. This gift of God's love calls for a personal response from me."

Questions

- a) What is the appeal of epic stories? Why do people enjoy them so much?
- b) Do I experience my Catholic Faith as a grand epic adventure still unfolding in which I am personally involved? Or do I perceive it as a good story that happened in the past that mildly impacts my thinking and behavior?
 - o To what degree do our parishioners experience their faith as the former vs. the latter?

Point 2: "It's a hasty presumption that even Mass-going Catholics all agree on this basic story."

- a) In what ways do our current faith formation ministries assume that people already know and believe this story? Give examples.
- b) Why is this assumption a problem?

Point 3: "The answer isn't more, better information transmission from my brain to yours." "My preaching and other efforts of education and formation need to be about bolstering up and trying to bring about the conversion of minds to these fundamental 'imaginative elements.'"

- a) In general, what leads to someone changing their mind about something? Offer an example from your own life about an experience that led you to change your mind about something.
- b) What sources does the Church have at her disposal to bring about this conversion of mind?
- c) What stories do we have at our disposal that will help people embrace the reality of the epic drama of God's love and the battle between good and evil in which we are involved?
- d) How can we bring these stories into our faith formation ministries? Give some examples of what this could look like.

MEETING 7

Book: Pages 75-90, Chapter 5 continued and Chapter 6: Readiness to Embrace the Times We are Given

Diocese of Sioux Falls Video 7 (15 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5c-yrXlz7c>

Scripture passage: Romans 12:2 - "be transformed by the renewal of your minds"

Discussion Questions

Point 1: The modern progressive secular "story":

- I. Utopianism - "we can overcome every social ill and achieve perfection by our own power and knowledge within time"
- II. Denial of the Fall - human beings are not fundamentally broken, things can be fixed if we just try hard enough
- III. Marginalization of God - God is not important to everyday life
- IV. Intoxication with the world of space and time - there is nothing beyond what we can see and measure
- V. Freedom to choose is the essence of human dignity and happiness
- VI. Consumer contentment as the default human experience

Questions

- a) Which of these elements of the modern progressive mindset do you see most prevalent in the people around you?
- b) Which of these elements of the modern progressive mindset do you see present in your own thinking?
- c) In what ways are we as a parish seeking "consumer contentment" among our parishioners rather than seeking the salvation of souls? Give some examples of ways that we tend to seek "consumer contentment."
- d) What would it look like to prioritize ministries and events that save souls rather than content consumers?

- e) The speakers claim that there has been profound suffering as a result of the modern progressive view of reality. To what degree are our parishioners and people in our parish boundaries experiencing these sufferings in their lives? Give some examples.
- f) What antidotes to these sufferings does the Church have at her disposal? How can we make these antidotes accessible to parishioners? To people in the neighborhood?

Point 2: Wrap-up discussion, where to go from here

- a) Do we need more formation on this subject? What should that look like? What options do we have available to us?
- b) What should the process of change look like in our parish? Where should we begin? Who else should we involve in this process?
- c) In light of all that we have discussed, what are some changes that you would like to make in your own area of ministry?

APPENDIX

The following are scripts that may be used to lead your group in *Lectio Divina* before beginning each meeting. The first script is timed for 5 minutes, the second is timed for 10 minutes. Feel free to use either script depending on the time you have available. Suggested Scripture passages have been noted at the beginning of each meeting's discussion questions above.

Script for Leading Lectio Divina

(Abbreviated version, 5 minutes)

Begin by invoking the Holy Spirit.

STEP 1: LECTIO (Read)

Say: "As I read the Scripture passage, allow the words to wash over you. In the silence that follows, take note of a word or phrase that particularly stood out to you."

[Read the passage aloud slowly, then pause in silence for 1 minute]

STEP 2: MEDITATIO (Reflect)

Say: "As I read the passage again, allow the words to sink in more deeply. In the silence that follows, ask God what he wants to say to you through the word or phrase that stood out to you. Take note of any insights that come."

[Read the passage aloud slowly, then pause in silence for 1 minute]

STEP 3: ORATIO (Pray) & STEP 4: CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplate)

After 1 minute, say: "In these last moments of silence, make your own response back to Jesus in light of what He has been saying to you."

[Pause in silence for 30 seconds]

End the time of *Lectio Divina* by leading the group in a *Glory Be*.

Script for Leading Lectio Divina

(Longer version, 10 minutes)

Begin by invoking the Holy Spirit.

STEP 1: LECTIO (Read)

Say: "Lectio: In this first step, as I read the Scripture passage, allow the words to wash over you. In the silence that follows, take note of a word or phrase that particularly stood out to you."

[Read the passage aloud slowly, then pause in silence for 1 minute]

STEP 2: MEDITATIO (Reflect)

Say: "Meditatio: As I read the passage again, focus your attention on the word or phrase that stood out to you. In the silence that follows, ask God what he wants to say to you through this word or phrase. Reflect on any insights that come."

[Read the passage aloud slowly, then pause in silence for 2 minutes]

STEP 3: ORATIO (Pray)

Say: "Oratio: In the next couple of minutes of silence, make your own personal response to the Father in light of what He has been saying to you."

[Pause in silence for 1-2 minutes]

STEP 4: CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplate)

Say: "Contemplatio: In these final moments of silence, simply rest in the love that God has for you and in the insights or graces received during this time of prayer."

[Pause in silence for 1-2 minutes]

End the time of Lectio Divina by leading the group in a Glory Be.